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back to the sense of the city

## UTOPIA AND IMAGINATION

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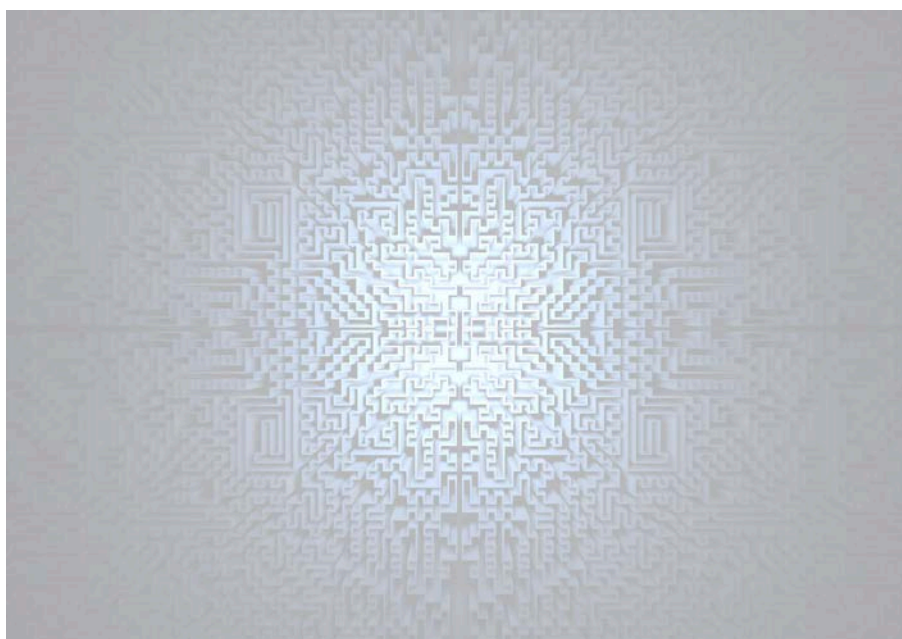
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### Abstract

The most important aim of the "Back to the Sense of the City" International Conference is to draw attention to the city and the sense of its being, the fact that a city seen as a heterogeneous entity is not only a work of its direct creators: architects, engineers, civil servants and municipal services, but all who "fill" it, primarily its inhabitants. A particular role is attributed to artists. It is the artists' duty not only to shape it but also creatively criticize and contemplate.



*Labyrinth 1 /a.g.biliński/*

Artistic actions understood as the city's activity and activity in relation to the city have certain qualities of utopian events, manifesting in the unattainability of a goal, idealistic activity base, transience of events and the type of references to it /to the city/<sup>1</sup>. The paper focuses on such interpretative approach to these actions. The meaning of this notion is usually interpreted as a place that does not exist, "... from the Greek outopos (gr. ou - no, topos - a place, non-place)<sup>2</sup>, place that does not exist, non-existent) and the eutopia (good place) ".<sup>3</sup>

Our statement, built on an idea of an internal dialogue, a dialogue between the main text and the footnotes and quotations, focuses on the changing of the ways of thinking about the city as a work of active art, on the role of an artist, architect, town-planner<sup>4</sup> in this process and their activities seen as special intellectual contribution to the development of this kind of space. It is also a kind of provocation relating to the description of similarities of the artistic and architectural activities in the context of the space of a city.<sup>5</sup>

## Architecture

Architecture is a somewhat separate field of art. It is more difficult to attribute it to the field of fine arts nowadays, as it used to be the case in the past<sup>6</sup>. It also doesn't seem to fit the visual

<sup>1</sup> By the City we understand all space-time-behavioral events directed at the space of residing, using sensorics, all the senses for its receiving and shaping, namely the senses of sight, touch, hearing, smell ....., all of it, together with our presence and the presence of the Other /animals nature/, who also serves the city and builds it according to certain rules and performative structures, we will call the City.

<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with the concept of Non-Space /Marc Auge, "Non-Places", PWN, Warsaw 2011/

<sup>3</sup> <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utopia>

<sup>4</sup> By an artist, a creator, I do not only mean here professional architects, urban planners, artists as the only "shareholders" of the process, but also all active people declaring participation with action and thought in such a process and their activities, that meet the criteria of the present definition. While the former are required to be there during the stage of formation /materialization/ of the city as its creators, the latter are essential when the city is alive, forming a specific, active part in its bloodstream.

<sup>5</sup> The essay, which we would like to introduce as a handful of thoughts of a person working on the border of these events, through my participation in the shaping of the substantial image of the Intermedia Department at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts in the form of the ArchiSphere Studio that I am the head of, as well as my being an active architect and artist.

<sup>6</sup> Renaissance attributed architecture to the realm of visual arts through a drawing as a "communication" binder. Not depreciating the traditional conceptual hand drawing as the language of the agreement in the sphere of architecture, it is clear that modern CAD technology and digital rendering slightly change this paradigm. See Gabriela Świtek "Games of Art and Architecture", ed. Fundacja na rzecz nauki polskiej, Toruń, 2013;

It should also be noted that the techniques of modeling and computer rendering are gaining more and more opportunities for individualization of artistic/shaping expression, they take into account the individual characteristics of the "operator - creator" and are increasingly becoming autonomous from the architecture itself, with the possibility of replacing not only the architectural drawing but also conceptual author's idea of the project, represented, up to now, by the original, hand-drawn concept drafts. A drawing, regardless of the media, which we use in its creation, appears to be a part of the discourse in the process of creation of space.

Returning to the password "plastyka" (Polish: "plastic arts") on Wikipedia, we will find under this entry also the information about architecture being the art of shaping spatial forms. It is an oversimplification and a misunderstanding of the nature of this art. Particularly divergent is the definition of the Urban Planning, see [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sztuki\\_plastyczne](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sztuki_plastyczne).

Encyclopedia PWN describes the architecture as "the art of creating order in the environment, in order to adapt it to meet multiple physical material and cultural needs of the people ... various task of contemporary architecture arise from the complex forms of organization of life, and from the rapid socioeconomic changes and technological progress. "(Encyclopedia PWN, t.2, Warsaw 2001). Since architecture builds the order, the primary question now seems to be the problem of order itself, what it is and what it is not, where are its limits, is order determined by aesthetics, function, civilizational, cultural paradigm....?

It is possible that the post-contemporary brings with it also a redefinition of the concepts concerning the plastic arts, or visual structures, if only because there are now tools that are expanding our perceptual abilities on one hand and limiting them on the other /Myopia as a civilization disease, the same with the hearing, etc ... /. The origins of this type of

arts, although this classification is closer to the truth. The problem of its existence is based on the fact that the Architecture and its perception relates to all possible sources of action toward and with a human being. First of all, those visual and related to the spatial form - not meant as an artistic sculptural form, but more a form that is "filling" the space, "surrounding" a person - participant, immersive. Auguste Perret<sup>7</sup> claimed that all the elements, movable or immovable that take their place within a space, are a part of a domain of architecture. The consequence of this thinking is a conclusion which situates architecture as a field more associated with the composition of various elements, their direction<sup>8</sup>. Indifference is the death of every thing and every action, activity gives life. And so it is the case with the cities understood, by the way, not only as a work of art. The act of composing and the spatial-behavioral combining of these areas is justified and firmly embedded in current architectural practice<sup>9</sup>. This applies particularly to the field of architecture known as urban planning.



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thinking can be found in the classic writings by an architect Oskar Hansen, a psychologist Rudolf Arnheim, and others. It seems that today the authors would define some of the issues in a different way.

<sup>7</sup> Auguste Perret, a French architect of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, a so-called "father of reinforced concrete";

<sup>8</sup> "Direction of Space" Anna Franta, ed. Krakow University of Technology, Kraków 2004;

<sup>9</sup> Architecture includes a number of areas, in addition to commonly understood architecture - the art of creating structures and their forms, also the architecture of landscape, the so-called interior design, urban planning, communication, virtual worlds including architectural utopia and so on.



## City as an Art Installation

When we talk about architecture, we should not forget the spatial relationship between a person - user and the environment created by architecture /with architectural methods/<sup>10</sup>. Art nowadays brings forth the experience, which helps us to explain these phenomena from the point of view of the fine arts<sup>11</sup>. One of such phenomena is an art Installation. Depending on the relation of a person /participant/ - space, we can distinguish an installation of architectural or sculptural origin. The architectural type aims to create an immersive space, surrounding and filling all objects and subjects that fall within its range. It can be a provocation or an observation<sup>12</sup>, it can also be purely artistic activity, without any social or political overtones. The first and fundamental act of building installations of the city is the act of its demarcation, an event which has always, even at present, had a sacred nature. This has been the case since the beginning of the Conscious building.<sup>13</sup> Art installations often refer to this phenomenon, particularly in the context of land art, or the city art itself<sup>14</sup>. While an art installation uses a metaphor, an architectural installation, so without a doubt also the city itself, is a direct experience. Installations, such as those in the form of wrapping of the City, created by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, are good examples of action with the urban space with the more reflective - aesthetic approach. However, if we assume that the installation is the architecture itself, and it is undeniably so, then also the city installation becomes the architecture at the relevant time. Within the visual arts, Installation<sup>15</sup> is a space-time limited formula in terms of development and space expansion and is rather single-direction in ideology, even if it is interactive, but architecture /urban planning/ as installation has an open and interactive structure, resulting from the nature of these events also in the limitlessness of space<sup>16</sup>. Urban planning, and consequently the city, which it relates to most frequently, seen as a work of art, so in accordance with the contemporary paradigms of art also an installation, is in its nature an open structure. The happening of a city has no intentional artistic ending, and only a possible death assigned by its nature. This death occurs when the human interest in the active and passive involvement in a specific architectural space ends or the creative possibilities of the place are

<sup>10</sup>The factor of participation of all participants in the creation of space was pointed out by many artists and architects. Architecture considered in terms of an event is discussed by a Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi cit. : "this is not a monument, which froze, it must also be an event ..." /Ewa Rewers, "Event in Urban Space", an article on the web <http://bylecoq.w.interiowo.pl/text/zdarzenie.htm/>, in a similar way we presented our thoughts during our exhibition "I am a point in space," SARP, Kraków, 1986.

<sup>11</sup>Visual arts have also "upgraded" in terms of ideas and forms of expression. One of the main currents of contemporary art is the installation, a creation which allows artistic expression through action with space. The difference between architecture and installation lies in intentionality, and while art installation generally refers to the memory, the architecture as an installation refers to the present or the future, and consequently the relational semantic of components or the "immersing in ..." of the participant and the quality of the forming matter is different.

It is worth mentioning that the issue of the new concept of "plastic arts" was considered by a large group of artists - modernists, for example Henryk Stażewski, Władysław Strzemiński ...;

<sup>12</sup>It is impossible not to mention here the video actions by Józef Robakowski, or fragments of the lecture preceding a performance of Ewa Partum in Berlin in 1983, in which the artist draws attention to the street, communication events in the city as a work of art, revealing thus a completely different perspective of perception and artistic reflection. (<http://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/partum-ewa-hommage-a-solidarnosc>)

<sup>13</sup>The tradition of setting Roman cities is well-known and embedded in the universal awareness, for example through a myth of Remus and Romulus.

<sup>14</sup>for example, one of the many architectural installations of this type: "Municipal water sculpture in Warsaw, which is based on the architectural paradigm of creating the space and it is, by itself a temporary architecture as such." /installation by Ewa Rudnicka, Warsaw, 2011/. On the other hand, volatility and a kind of temporariness of events characteristic to architectural installations is present in the projects of Jean Nouvel. For example, the building of the Radio Copenhagen, with its walls-displays, or the vertical gardens, changing according to the seasons and time, and many others. One of the essential objects in this field today is the Blur Bilding by Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, realized at one of the Swiss lakes.

<sup>15</sup>inter alia: "Color, sound and rhythm," Izabela Franckiewicz, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warsaw 2010; An important notion here is the one saying an art installation activates the participant towards the space they are occupying.

<sup>16</sup>The issue of interactivity is defined and discussed in a book "Interactive Art" by Richard W. Kluszczyński, Wydawnictwo Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw, 2010; Sensual immersion and bodily immersion appear to be basic experiences of interactivity in reality of architecture, including the reality of the city. It should also be noted that the city, like any architectural space, has its own values and virtual reality.

exhausted<sup>17</sup>. It should be emphasized that the actual death that results from a different time horizon, when considering architecture as installation, does not change the values of the urban system as a work of art but only reevaluates them. Good examples of it happening is the city of Detroit, or the dying of the post-mining settlements, such as Ujków Stary<sup>18</sup> in the Lesser Poland province, and many others. But before the city dies, very often attempts of its resuscitation are being made. Phenomena of resuscitation of cities often takes place through the use of activities of a happening or installation art. This is what was and is still happening, for example, in Łódź and such kind of activities try the "resuscitation" through artistic activities in Detroit<sup>19</sup>. It is also what has happened during the reconstruction of Warsaw, where it's hard not to regard the reconstruction of the Old Town and Royal Castle as a great act of an artistic event, and where the objects themselves lost its historical value with the expense of the installation one. In such cases, often the actions of artists and architects enable us to go back to the sense of the city, allow to draw attention to the topics essential for the life of cities through referring to the people and the basic concepts that unite a city, such as history, memory, ecology, a human being .... This aspect of action in relation to urban space is supported by all active participants of architecture. It formally adopts the rules of a dialogue through actions and installations. It is those that become a platform of understanding and the language of dialogue. In view of the changing perspectives on the ontology of experiencing space and the human factor altogether, architecture is often faced with the problem of the fragility and transience of existence. It is treated as a transient type of space, associated with only one generation and sometimes even with one particular event.

Distinct examples in the current times are stadiums, exhibition spaces, or the "single-use"<sup>20</sup> housing estates, all built with huge effort, and many times abandoned just after the end of the life of an "event" they have been created to facilitate.<sup>21</sup> It is important to go back to the issue of utopia, which often occurs in such activities. In these types of projects, their creators tend to refer their work mostly to the realm of ideas, or contents with no real possibility of their materialization either as a whole or even in part. A blueprint of a city, during the process of demarcation is merely an idea which will later be destroyed by reality, the layering of events that lose its original memory. Moving on to the political, social art, being one of the essential contents of urban space and architecture and not intended to be a part of art collections, its visual and material side is not its most important element, but only a method used. The existence of this art form makes sense and is only performed in a course of a happening. This does not change the fact or the meaning of existence of art characterized by a greater degree of visual and aesthetic reflection, based on a different principle of materialization of the meaning of its existence, so a type of art that is closer to the traditional painting, sculpture and graphics.

<sup>17</sup> this relates not only to artistic possibilities but also social, political, industrial, etc ....

<sup>18</sup> The case of Ujków Stary, a village deserted due to mining damage is an example of an attempt of artistic and scientific restoration of the place, through numerous installations and artistic activities of students of the Faculty of Intermedia at the Academy of Fine Arts, scientists and researchers from Universities: Silesian and Jagiellonian. This has been done since 2015, that is, until the death of its last inhabitant, when the town moved to a stage of agony.

<sup>19</sup> An element of such activity is for example the "Heidelber" project. Example of description: <http://6757km.com/2015/06/detroit-miasto-powstajace-z-popiolow/> It has engaged a community in artistic interventions in the dying city, in order to activate it. Coming from a completely different but also a very important type of activity in relation to urban space is the placement of the palm tree in Jerozolimskie Ave. in Warsaw, the project by Joanna Rajkowska.

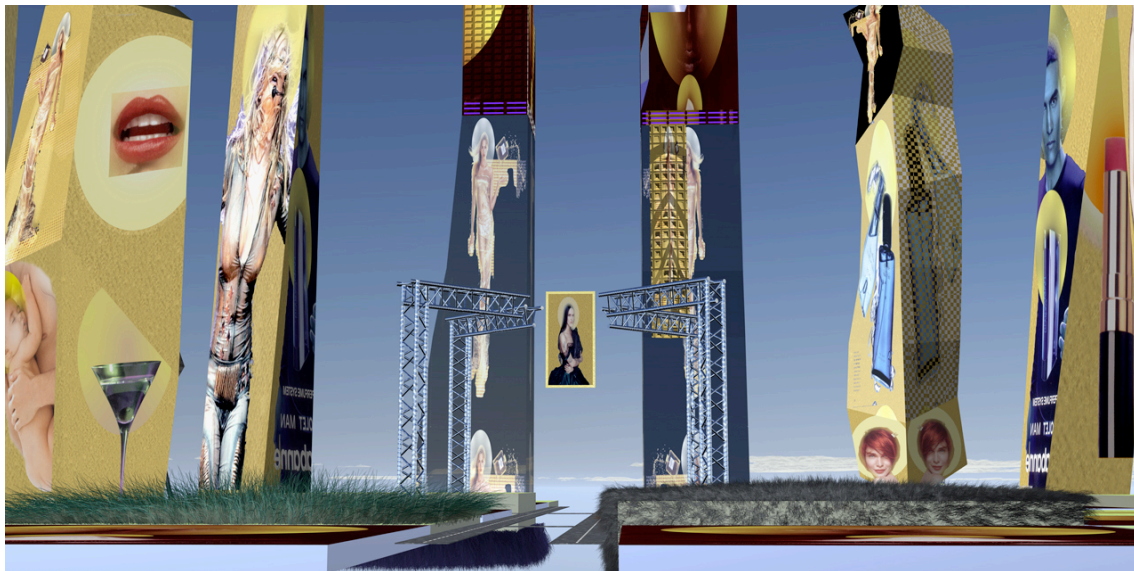
<sup>20</sup> Settlements built for refugees and victims of natural disasters, field schools for example in Africa, outdoor exhibition pavilions, and finally military camps of expeditionary units /Iraq/ etc ... The actual methods of construction have also changed, and today they allow for printing of spatial structures thanks to the 3D printers. We can print a house, furniture and many other items without leaving our homes, even the parts of our body to be used as prosthesis. If so, it means that it is easy, temporary, dynamic in the variability, widespread.

<sup>21</sup> In 1981, the UIA Congress of the International Association of Architects took place in Warsaw. It was then decided to set up the so-called Warsaw Charter. In a formal sense, the ambition was to come up with a postmodern response to the modernist Athens Charter. One of the claims it was making said that architecture is alive, as long as there is a person who fills it. This fact, forgotten today, I am quoting from memory as a participant of these events. Perhaps it is too loose an interpretation of the statements made in the Charter but it has stuck in my memory for years, almost as a paradigm. The realization of these claims is strengthened by a technological and aesthetic development, so powerful and dynamic at the present time.

This type of art is not a direct emotional response, but more a reflection, closely related to the aesthetics and its experiencing, as a natural human need. In this case, the city and the architecture is not a participant of such activities but, above all, it is the object of such a reflection, often losing its subjectivity to the subjectivity of the artist, who is expressing it<sup>22</sup>.

### The Image of Architecture. Passive shaping of the city.

The city seems to function in such situations more as an object and a pretext for inquiry, it is giving up its subjectivity. Although this thread is secondary in the realm of issues concerning the image of a city, it should not be considered only as an aesthetic event, where "nice" pictures become the essence of these activities. I am interested in the author's personal approach to the artistic analysis of the phenomenon of the city's space<sup>23</sup>. These images are, above all, a reflection and often a critical materialization of observations, thoughts and experience. What they cover are merely perceptions, used sometimes as pretexts, nonetheless they remain autonomous works of art. This exhibition, apart from a few exceptions focuses on this approach to the subject at hand.



*City blue /a.g.biliński/*

### A Screen of the City. Imaging of architecture, image as a screen of the city

The action of imaging, which builds a specific language of understanding, a communication between the subjects of this action. The city, in all its dynamic sphere of existence, is revealed through screening. Sometimes these are actual displays showing what is happening in the city: from different kinds of action to the technical data, eg. air pollution. Sometimes it is great murals

<sup>22</sup> In his book, "Interactive Art", Richard W. Kluszczyński writes: "The relationship between an image and an imaged world: from difference to identity." It seems this passage reflects most adequately the relationship, which I describe in this chapter, and which by paraphrasing, I would like to treat as a description of the essence of the difference between the city-installation and the city depicted in painting, graphic ... fine arts, plastic arts, as artistic activities from and towards urban and architectural space.

<sup>23</sup> It is worth to mention here the paintings of Arthur Przebinowski, the painterly utopias by Adam Wsiolkowski, Joseph Gielniak, or the "Red Cities" and "Blue Cities" by Alicja and Grzegorz Biliński (our own works), etc.

commenting on reality and sometimes just the facades of the buildings, paving on the streets, recreation areas, public squares .... Always, however, it is a kind of a city's dialogue with itself. Screening is also a personification of the city through the people that speak artistically on its behalf<sup>24</sup>, and so filling it, being the City itself.

### *Utopia, the image of the future, unfulfilled dream of the city.*<sup>25</sup>

I would like to conclude my reflections on art and architecture seen as artistic installation, in the context of a return to the essence of the sense of the city, with reflection on utopias as a specific form of artistic expression of an unreal city in an unreal future. This kind of utopia, which I would call an artistic utopia, focuses its attention on the image of the impossible city, especially on its form. Utopias, as non-existent Worlds, obtain their images in artistic visions<sup>26</sup>, images not always visual. A strong position is being held by acoustic imaging, or touch-related imaging ...<sup>27</sup> In the case of actions relating to statements of urban utopia, the essential form of expression is visual imagery, but there is also another one, the experience. It is realized by building of a model, using a different scale, simulating phenomena, operating on a detail. It is impossible not to mention here the architect and discoverer of such lands, Zbigniew Oksiuta who, with his futuristic experiments with biological tissues, attempts to build a future vision of Cities in the context of AstroNature.

Reflections on utopia, the future of cities in the utopian vision, applies not only to the cities imagined but also the cities of today and it has an impact on what contemporary urban planning has to offer.<sup>28</sup>

To conclude discussing the utopian city, it is impossible not to mention modern activities within the city, that aim to build a fearsome system of communication and control over the City. Such an approach, dangerous, possible to try to implement, and even partially already introduced thanks to the modern, technological electronic means, is being put to our attention by, among others, Sławomir Gutowski<sup>29</sup> "At the same time, creating a vision of an ideal community, a perfectly shaped urban space, the architects had in mind a definition of an appropriate framework for forms of human coexistence, and not a model of urban planning implying any particular faith. However, it is important not to ignore the opinion voiced by Herbert Marcuse, who described the means of communication as a system of mass production, aimed at imposing a particular social model by inspiring and satisfying false needs. Technical

<sup>24</sup> For example Cecylia Malik, a Krakow-based performer involved in activities promoting environment awareness in the city. Also a virtual urban structures should be mentioned here, ones present on numerous virtual websites - urban structures of artistic activities, artistic groups, lecture spaces, virtual art galleries, etc ...;

<sup>25</sup> Georges Perec, known for his book "Life - Manual", is also an author of "Espèces d'espèces" (1974), discussing the upcoming spaces ... "We live in space; in spaces - in the cities, among the fields, in the hallways, in the parks. / ... / There's no reason, for example, not to imagine something, which would not be a city or rural setting (or suburb) or to imagine a park in the corridors of a subway. We should also not be discouraged to imagine a subway in the middle of the fields of Campania"; as quoted by Gabriela Świtek in "Games of Art with Architecture", ed. Fundacja na rzecz nauki polskiej, Toruń, 2013;

<sup>26</sup> As for example, the images of the City by Adam Wsiolkowski;

<sup>27</sup> For example the sound - location actions by Marek Chołoniewski, run since many years in cities around the world.

<sup>28</sup> Direct actions, utopian trends in contemporary urban planning, from modernist utopias by Le Corbusier to the current activities, such as Smart City - a very fashionable concept and a trend in the current times of new technologies, the New Urbanism, which can generally be defined as installations and an artistic event, or the green cities, for example the upcoming Ecocity in Seoul, with its characteristic green mounds. All of these cities' paradigm is subject to constant, varying evaluations. The China's green city, now under construction, is the embodiment of a utopian city in progress, regardless of the semantic paradox of the term. Another example of utopian cities being developed are all virtual cities, regardless of this fact we recognize virtuality as part of reality today, and the border virtuality - reality is becoming more and more blurred.

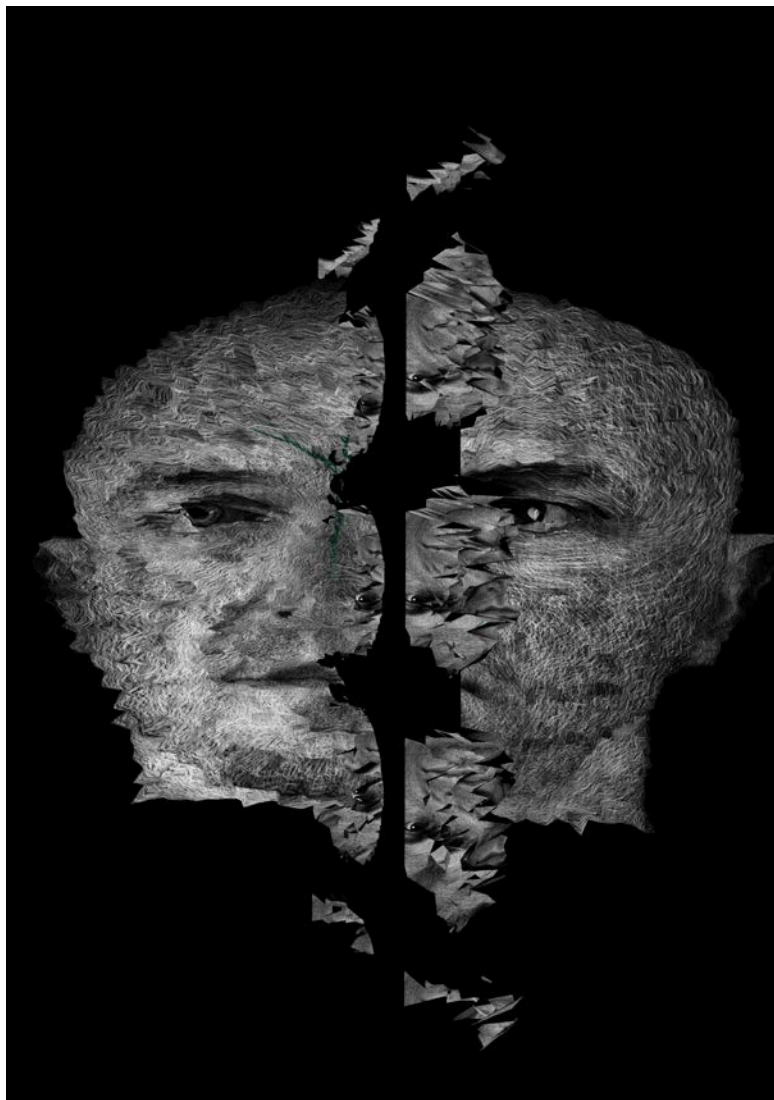
Another utopian strategy within modern cities are "compassionate" cities, the creation of which is also shared by artists, through their research from the border of art and science. These cities take on human impressions, mechanize them and turn them into technological information, a process as much dangerous as functional, but most likely limiting the human evolution.

<sup>29</sup> "Space of dreamers, a city as a utopian project" by Sławomir Gutowski, Warsaw 2006;

rationalization and instrumentation of thinking through language of the mass media finds a fertile ground in a one-dimensional society, in which the individual loses their critical sense."<sup>30</sup>

The presented considerations lead to the conclusion that a return to the sense of the city can happen through art, the one subjected to a reflection related to the Memory, as well as one living the contemporary ardor, active and immersing in the urban space, frequently based on the expressive reaction to reality, or that which goes far ahead in its vision and reaches the Utopia. The binder of these activities, however, will always be the anchoring on the ground of sensitive humanism, the good of the people in the context of the good of Another, who co-creates the environment of the city, so the return to the base of archetypal paradigms.

This statement is probably not innovative, but well worth of constant reminding and redefining. It requires a continuous examination of our Consciousness and our cultural-civilization maturity, of which the Art is the most important achievement. That is the intention of this argument and, as we think, an essence of a return to the sense of the City.



/a.g.biliński/

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth to quote here the author's own work, in collaboration with Alicja Duzel, "Blue Cities" /Krzysztofory, Kraków, 2003/;